

Written Testimony of
Rabbi Amy Bigman
Rabbi of Congregation Shaarey Zedek
East Lansing, Michigan

Before the
Michigan House of Representatives
Families, Children and Seniors Committee
Tuesday, February 14, 2012

Chairperson Kurtz and members of the Committee: Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide my written testimony in opposition to House Concurrent Resolution 11, a resolution in support of a so-called federal 'parental rights amendment' to the United States Constitution and a thinly veiled attempt to undermine the United States ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

My name is Amy Bigman and I am the Rabbi of Congregation Shaarey Zedek in East Lansing. I was asked by my friends at the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan to provide testimony on my personal and religious objections to HCR 11 as well as my support for the ratification of the UNCRC.

Congregation Shaarey Zedek was founded in 1918 and is affiliated with the Union for Reform Judaism. We provide for the spiritual needs of Jewish families and individuals by conducting services in both the Conservative and Reform traditions and strive to provide a center in the Greater Lansing area where Jews can learn, pray, celebrate joyous occasions and comfort each other in times of need. With approximately 250 families in our congregation, Shaarey Zedek offers a rich and varied program of education, cultural and social events while reaching out to the Greater Lansing community on a perpetual basis to strengthen interfaith ties. As such, I founded the East Lansing Area Clergy Association in June 2010; I continue to serve as its president and coordinator.

My friends at the ACLU have told me that last week several individuals testified before this Committee and claimed that if ratified by the United States, the UNCRC would harm American families and undermine the efforts of American parents to responsibly parent their children. My friends at the ACLU also told me that last week supporters of HCR 11 said that the ratification of the UNCRC would threaten the religious education of children and religiosity in the United States more broadly.

Shaarey Zedek provides religious school instruction for children in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade. Jewish tradition is very education-centered; education is encouraged throughout one's lifetime. It is my opinion that if ratified, the UNCRC would in no way adversely alter or harm our congregation's religious school or the adult educational programs we offer for our congregants. Additionally, it is my opinion that the concerns raised by supporters of HCR 11 regarding the supposed threats towards religious instruction and American religiosity are unfounded once one actually reads the Convention and observes its ratification by other nations.

At Shaarey Zedek, we seek to couple our religious convictions with the promotion of social justice. The Reform Movement of Judaism has a great amount of policy aimed at improving the lives of children in North America and across the globe. Resolutions have been passed by the Union for Reform Judaism (our North American congregational union), the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and the Women of Reform Judaism, supporting the health and welfare of children.

For the reasons mentioned above, I urge the Committee to not support House Concurrent Resolution 11 or any other efforts to undermine American children and families by further delaying the ratification of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Amy B. Bigman